

**The  
Intercept\_**

# INTERCEPTED PODCAST: RUSSIAMANIA — GLENN GREENWALD VS. JAMES RISEN

Two journalists from the same publication, but with very different views on the Trump/Russia story, go head-to-head in a debate.

Intercepted

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Photo Illustration: Elise Swain. Virginia Lozano for The Intercept (Risen)

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**We can't seem to find what you're looking for.**

James Risen and Glenn Greenwald have both won Pulitzer Prizes. They both have found themselves in the crosshairs of the U.S. government for their journalism. And they both write for The Intercept. But Jim and Glenn have taken very different approaches to covering the Trump/Russia story. This week on Intercepted, they go head-to-head in a debate. Glenn is one of the most high-profile critics of the official story that has been put forward by the U.S. intelligence community, the Democrats, and many media outlets, including some of this country's most powerful papers and news channels. Jim battled both the Bush and Obama administrations — under threat of imprisonment — for refusing to name his sources in some of the most sensitive national security reporting of the modern era. Jim broke a key story on a secret NSA channel to Russia and [his first column](#) for The Intercept, about the Trump/Russia investigation, posed the question: Is Donald Trump a traitor?

A video special of the full debate is [here](#).

**Donald J. Trump:** My fellow Americans, today I speak to a nation in grief. Our entire nation, with one heavy heart, is praying for the victims and their families.

**DJT:** Now speaking to the NRA folks, who are great. I love the NRA. I love the Second Amendment so you have to know that, and I want to speak now directly to America's children. I want you to know.

**DJT:** This is what happens. That was a horrible thing and you're not going to be able to protect yourselves.

**DJT:** What you need, what you need.

**DJT:** You know, we have some incredible pro-Second Amendment governors here including Governor Scott of Florida, where is Governor Scott?

**DJT:** And so always, but especially today.

**DJT:** To the NRA, I can proudly say, I will never, ever let you down.

**DJT:** In these moments of heartache and darkness, I will never ever infringe on the right of the people to keep and bear arms. Thank you and God bless you all. Thank you very much.

[Musical interlude.]

**Jeremy Scahill:** This is Intercepted.

[Musical interlude.]

**JS:** I'm Jeremy Scahill, coming to you from the offices of The Intercept in New York City and this is episode 45 of Intercepted.

**Laura Ingraham:** Have we ever tried to meddle other countries' elections?

**James Woolsey:** Oh probably, but it was for the good of the system, in order to avoid the communists from taking over. For example, in Europe in '47, '48, '49, the Greeks and the Italians. The CIA —

**LI:** We don't do that now, though? We don't mess around in other peoples' elections now?

**JW:** Well! Nom, nom, nom, nom, nom. Only for a very good cause —

**LI:** [Laughing.] Can we do a Vine video of that?

**JS:** That was former CIA Director James Woolsey. He was speaking to Laura Ingraham on Fox News — quite the contrast to the analysts that you hear all day and night on other media outlets.

Now, just to be clear, I have zero admiration whatsoever for James Woolsey. He was dangerous when he was CIA director. He was also an early backer of Donald Trump. But James Woolsey, of course, was telling part of the truth that is seldom stated these days, especially on large media platforms.

The U.S. has a long, long history of intervening in other countries' elections and affairs, of overthrowing democratically elected governments, of financing murderous campaigns to punish populations that voted for the wrong candidates. And on, and on.

There was a study by Carnegie Mellon University that found that the U.S. had interfered in more than 80 presidential elections around the world and that was from 1946 to 2000, and those stats don't even include all the coups, the regime changes, et cetera, that the United States has conducted after someone the U.S. doesn't like takes power in a country or a leader falls out of favor with the United States.

Now Woolsey's bullshit about the U.S. interfering in elections for all the right reasons is of course, just that. It's bullshit.

But James Woolsey's comments aren't so different than the sentiments offered by Donald Trump about Vladimir Putin in an interview that he did with Fox News.

**Bill O'Reilly:** Putin's a killer.

**DJT:** A lot of killers, we've got a lot of killers. What, you think our country is so innocent?

**JS:** The reason I'm bringing up these examples is because whether the U.S. media want to talk about it or not, there are a whole lot of

people across the globe who have long resented the U.S. meddling in their country's affairs.

Americans are now facing some questions that people in many countries have had to ask for many years. Questions about their own leaders. Questions about the role of foreign powers, including the United States and Russia, in their internal affairs and their elections. And all of this has to be taken into account when we study the ever-unfolding investigation into Trump and Russia and the 2016 elections. Why? Because context matters.

It's almost never talked about, but remember when Barack Obama appeared in a video in 2017 backing Emmanuel Macron in France during the election campaign there?

**President Barack Obama:** Because of how important this election is, I also want you to know that I am supporting Emmanuel Macron to lead you forward. En marche! Vive la France!

**JS:** Now, of course Obama was no longer U.S. president when he recorded this video, but isn't this one of the most powerful Americans on the planet right now? Intervening to influence the elections in a foreign country? I mean given Obama's global popularity, such an intervention could be very powerful. It might have even swayed some French voters.

Can you imagine if a former Russian leader had released a video during the 2016 U.S. elections that encouraged people to vote for Donald Trump? Can you imagine what the reaction would have been in the U.S.?

Anyway, here is the big development in recent days on Trump-Russia.

**Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein:** According to the allegations in the indictment, the defendants posed as politically and socially active Americans, advocating for and against particular candidates. They established social media pages and groups to communi-

cate with unwitting Americans. They also purchased political advertisements on social media networks.

The Russians also recruited and paid real Americans to engage in political activities, promote political campaigns and stage political rallies.

**JS:** These recently announced indictments coming out of the special prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation were announced by the Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. And they detail the alleged activities of some powerful Russian businessmen using social media and some real-live, real-world events in an effort to sow discord in the U.S. elections.

Now, for argument's sake, I don't have any trouble believing that Robert Mueller has the evidence to support his case. But the questions we are left with include: Did it actually have an impact? Did it change any votes? Was it actually ordered by any Russian government officials? Did any Trump people wittingly or willingly participate?

We may never know the answer to any or all of those questions. And, personally, I think that the U.S. as a society does a pretty good job of spreading junk and misinformation around the web on its own — that any outside help is sort of secondary.

But the way that this is being discussed on major media outlets is like these indictments reveal a plot that is akin to Pearl Harbor.

**Representative Jerry Nadler:** Imagine if FDR denied that the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor, and didn't react. That's the equivalent.

**Chris Hayes:** Well it's a bit of a different thing.

**JN:** No, it's not.

**CH:** I mean, they didn't kill anyone.

**JN:** They didn't kill anyone but they're destroying our democrat — our country.

**CH:** Do you really think, you think it's on par?

**JN:** Not in the amount of violence, but I think in the seriousness, it is very much on par.

**JS:** Not one, but two guests last week made that analogy on the same MSNBC show in primetime.

**Philippe Reines:** To Congressman Nadler's point, I do think this is equivalent of Pearl Harbor. Not the loss of life, but imagine if in the days and weeks and a year after —

**JS:** Come on. I have read all of the indictments and the plea agreements that have been made public. And I have to say that such a comparison, Pearl Harbor, is just plain nuts. We should get to the bottom of what exactly happened and the full extent of Russian government involvement, but this kind of loony hyperbole doesn't help anything at all. I don't even believe it helps the case of people who think that Putin personally conspired with Donald Trump to destroy Hillary Clinton.

So here are some of the questions that have not been answered about this whole Trump-Russia situation that I think need to be resolved before we can really assess what happened and what impact it had.

First, did Donald Trump actively participate in a conspiracy with the Russian government or its representatives to interfere in the U.S. presidential election in 2016? Was it criminal activity or just activity that some, maybe many, maybe most Americans would find immoral and improper? Same question goes for Trump's inner circle.

Another question: Did the Russian government actually direct and finance the effort to hack the DNC and John Podesta's e-mails. Let's see the evidence. There are forensic experts who say "Open/shut case:

Yes.” And there are experts who say that it’s far from proven. The CIA and the NSA also have the ability to falsify data and leave fake fingerprints. I’m not saying that that’s the most likely scenario, but what I am saying is that when you’re dealing with the CIA and the NSA, everything must be on the table. If this case is open and shut about Russia directing this, let’s see the evidence.

Next question: If Russia did hack or was in possession of these e-mails, how did they end up in WikiLeaks’ hands? And, I’m sorry, just hating Julian Assange is not proof. Julian Assange having some shared visions or even desired outcomes of an election in common with Russia does not a criminal conspiracy make. Let’s see the actual evidence that Julian Assange and WikiLeaks got these documents from Russia.

Why did Michael Flynn lie to the FBI about his communications with Russia? What we do know is that Mike Flynn was talking to Russia about helping Israel. Was Flynn lying because he was covering up a secret conspiracy with Russia? Or was he lying because of the hype around Trump and Russia? Was he lying for some other reason we don’t yet understand? That’s pretty important to know.

Also what actually happened at that Trump Tower meeting with the Russian lawyer and Don Jr. and Jared Kushner? It’s all mired right now in a whole bunch of half-truths and bullshit emanating from the Trump camp. Let’s get to the bottom of what actually happened there.

Did anything ever materialize in the form of evidence that showed direct sharing of dirt on Hillary Clinton by Russia with the Trump campaign? We’ve heard a lot about offers from people who, through a maze of this dot and that dot and the other dot lead you back to, “They must be working for the Kremlin.” But again, facts are important and we need to see the actual evidence.



Steve Bannon said in that book “Fire and Fury” that all of this ultimately is about money laundering. Is that true? What happens if the only charges against Trump people turn out to be lying to federal investigators or obstructing justice or unrelated financial crimes? What do we then conclude about all of this and all of the attention that it’s received?

You know because Trump is such a cartoonish villain, it seems like large sectors of the American population aren’t really interested in seeing more information to conclude that Vladimir Putin put Donald Trump in the White House, or that Trump should be impeached and put on trial. And, you know what, maybe at the end of the day, when all the facts are on the table, that’s precisely what should happen. But it’s going to hurt all of us and the democratic process in this country if we have a verdict first and a trial later.

I would argue that the same is true with how we currently assess this story. The publication that I co-founded, The Intercept, has published a very wide range of stories dealing with the Trump-Russia investigation. And I’ll tell you, there is a ferocious debate on these very issues internally among the staff of The Intercept.

My colleague, Glenn Greenwald, is now a frequent guest on FOX News and he is constantly trolled on social media by people accusing him of being a Kremlin stooge or being on the Russian payroll. People like to joke, “Oh, it’s the Ivancept.” I guess that’s funny, Ivancept? Oh, I get it! It’s because Russians have a popular name, Ivan? Anyway, I’ll leave it to them.

Glenn is one of the most high-profile critics of the official story that has been put forward by the U.S. intelligence community, the Democrats and many media outlets, including some of this country’s most powerful and influential newspapers and news channels. Glenn has been relentless in his criticism of CNN, MSNBC, The New York Times and The Washington Post, just to name a few.

On the flip side my colleague, James Risen, recently wrote the first of what will be a series of columns for The Intercept examining the facts in the Russia investigation. Jim's first column was titled "Is Donald Trump a Traitor?" Now, Jim as you'll recall, also broke this story recently that there was a secret NSA communication channel set up with Russians offering to sell dirt on Donald Trump, remember this was the thing where the NSA used its official Twitter feed to send coded messages to the Russians? Jim Risen battled both the Bush and Obama administrations, under the threat of imprisonment, for refusing to name his sources in some of the most sensitive national security reporting of the modern era. Jim and Glenn have both won Pulitzer Prizes. They both have found themselves in the crosshairs of the U.S. government for their journalism.

But Jim and Glenn have taken very different approaches to covering the Trump-Russia story, so we decided to organize a debate between them.

On Wednesday evening, The Intercept is going to post online a one-hour video special of Intercepted, which I moderated and today we're going to give the listeners of this show an advanced opportunity to hear some excerpts from that debate. We begin with James Risen:

**James Risen:** I hadn't really written very much about the whole Trump-Russia case before. But I realize that it was, you know, this huge, ongoing story and so I should try to educate myself.

And what struck me first of all was the gravity of and significance of what it means potentially, not what it actually means so far but the potential. At heart this is a case about whether or not the president of the United States is a traitor. Is he an agent of a foreign power? And that obviously hasn't been proven yet. But that's what this case is about.

And if you read the letter that Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general wrote, signing, you know giving the mandate to Robert

Mueller to investigate this, it reads a lot like the, the definition of treason. You know, it's not the same, but it's similar enough that I think you could draw parallels. There's so much that I wanted to break it up into different discrete parts.

The first part is: What is the level of evidence we now have for the fact that, whether the Russians intervened in the 2016 election on behalf of Trump?

The second is: Did the Trump campaign or did Donald Trump himself collude with the Russians in that effort? The third part is: Is Donald Trump or people around him, are they now engaged in an obstruction of justice to try to impede the Mueller investigation.

And fourth, you know: Are Republicans now enabling that obstruction through efforts to discredit the investigation?

The basic premise of the whole case is whether or not the Russians intervened and so everything falls apart if you can't make a case for that, and so I wanted to start with that.

On the idea that the Russians did in some fashion intervene in the, in the election in order to help Trump and hurt Clinton. You have to say that the evidence is growing stronger. It's not completely conclusive, but I think that the preponderance of evidence today is that the Russians, the Russian intelligence community, and other elements of the Russian government made a decision to get involved in a cyber campaign beginning in 2014, 2015.

There's one report, I think it came from the Department of Homeland Security's cyber office and the FBI after the election and it's one of the reports that hasn't gotten very much attention, it described what I take to be an interesting narrative on the early days of the Russian hack and it suggests that it was very opportunistic. That makes perfect sense that this was not some grand conspiracy by the Russians.

From that point I think, then, you begin to see a more concerted effort by the Russians to focus on Clinton.

**Rod Rosenstein:** Good afternoon. A grand jury, in the District of Columbia, today returned an indictment.

**JR:** And what we now see in this new indictment from Mueller's office ...

**RR:** The indictment charges 13 Russian nationals, and 3 Russian companies for committing federal crimes, while seeking to interfere in the United States' political system, including the 2016 presidential election.

**JR:** There's this whole effort to use a disinformation campaign separate from the e-mail hack to focus negative, fake stories on Hillary Clinton.

**RR:** The defendants allegedly conducted what they call information warfare against the United States, with the stated goal of spreading distrust towards the candidates and the political system in general.

**JR:** That's a covert action. That's an intelligence agency's effort to influence a foreign country, which, shocker: we do all the time. The United States does very similar things around the world and has forever. The question in my mind is not whether that ultimately made the difference in the election, and I'm not here to say that the Russians won the election for Donald Trump at all.

You can believe in the existence of a covert action or an intelligence program without then believing in some political implications of it.

**JS:** Glenn Greenwald, let's bring you in here for a response. You have been confronted on Twitter and other social media platforms in the aftermath of Jim Risen's article with the provocative title of, "Is Donald Trump a Traitor?"

And people were sort of saying, “Well, doesn’t Glenn Greenwald read his own publication. Are you saying that you know that Jim Risen is a liar?” Your response to Jim and the theory and ideas that he just laid out.

**Glenn Greenwald:** So I do want to preface everything I’m about to say in light of the Internet’s very charming propensity to characterize every disagreement as some kind of very personalized war. **Jim Risen has long been, and still is, one of my heroes in journalism.** You know, his 2005 Pulitzer Prize story on the NSA is essentially what I spent the first year of my career in journalism working on.

So having said all that, I do have a lot of disagreements with Jim on his views of the Trump-Russia story generally, and some really deep-seated objections to this article in particular, which I just want to outline briefly.

To me the most bothersome and the one that’s most valid is the way in which the entire article was framed, beginning with the headline which suggested that Donald Trump may be a traitor. Jim, and his description of his article, began by acknowledging that he’s not saying Trump is a traitor, because we don’t know if Trump did the things he’s accused of doing in terms of collusion. But Jim in the article did say that, and he said again now, that if Trump did in fact collude with the Russians then it very well may mean that he’s a traitor, which is another way of saying that someone is guilty of treason.

And the sentence that I found most objectionable in the article itself was when Jim wrote, “If a presidential candidate or his lieutenants secretly work with a foreign government that is a longtime adversary of the United States to manipulate and then win a presidential election, that is almost a textbook definition of treason.”

That is not just wrong, but dangerously wrong. It’s completely not a textbook definition of treason, and it’s extremely important to be careful about what treason does and doesn’t mean. And there was a

fantastic article just from two days ago by Steven Vladeck, who's a professor of law at the University of Texas, who on NBC's website wrote a really great article about why it's so dangerous to throw the word treason around recklessly in cases where it clearly doesn't apply.

And he meant it in two senses: One, Trump had just said that maybe the Democrats were traitors for not standing and clapping for all of the great things that are happening to the United States, and then the other one is that Trump might be a traitor for colluding with the Russians.

**DJT:** Un-American, somebody said treasonous. I mean — yeah, I guess why not? [Audience laughs, cheers, and applauds.] Can we call that treason? Yeah, why not. I mean they certainly didn't seem to love our country very much. You look at that —

**GG:** And he said, “The mere existence of this question, of whether Trump is a traitor, underscores the need for a long overdue moratorium on the blithe characterization of things as treason and for all of us to be far more careful when using that term to describe conduct that we believe is some combination of reprehensible, criminal and perhaps even impeachable.”

As Jim acknowledges in the article, the Constitution defines treason and it says, “Treason against United States shall consist only in levying war against them or in that adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort.”

And what Professor Vladeck said is that, contrary to Jim's suggestion in the article that, “Well, it's kind of a vague term, so we don't really know if collusion would fit into it,” it's actually not vague at all. And he cited a federal appeals court in 1986, who explained, “The reason for the restrictive definition of treason is apparent from the historical backdrop of the treason clause. The framers of the Constitution were reluctant to facilitate such prosecutions because they were well

aware of abuses and they themselves were traitors in the eyes of England. As a result treason is, in some respects, the most specific crime in our legal system ... In this context, enemies, for example, must be countries against which Congress has formally declared war or otherwise authorized the use of force ... treason is a crime indicating the clear support of our enemies during war time. Period.”

And I found the framing so dangerous, because, for two reasons, one is there is this attempt to suggest that Russia is our enemy with whom we’re at war. And the amazing thing about that is that president Obama spent eight years rejecting that view: Russia is not our enemy. In fact, we want to partner with them in Syria, against terrorism and elsewhere.

In 2012, Mitt Romney said Russia was our enemy and the Democrats put out a video mocking that, saying that was true in the Cold War.

**Madeleine Albright:** He is not up to date. That’s just an example of his 20th century approach to 21st century issues.

**GG:** So, you could never get anywhere near treason.

**JR:** What you’ve just expressed leads me back to what I’ve come to think about the way you write about the Trump and Russia story. Many times what you do is you criticize the political or journalistic points of view of either the writer or a politician who is talking about Trump and Russia, fairly and often validly, but you don’t deal with the underlying issue of the substance of the Trump and Russia case.

Because I’ve read a lot of what you write about this and often your criticism deflects from the underlying issues and you build a whole case critical of reporters or critical of pundits without dealing with these underlying issues. In one of your most recent stories, you talk about this Dutch politician who admitted he lied about Putin. But buried in that story you say: “There is convincing evidence of Russian

meddling.” And you link to a story about the Internet Research Agency.

**JS:** That was the organization at the center of these indictments.

**JR:** Yeah and then these a few days later they were indicted by Mueller. And so I wonder whether the way in which you write about these issues masks an acceptance of the substance of the case that you don’t want to talk about.

**GG:** Let me explain to you first why I began with the point about whether or not Donald Trump is a traitor is a fair question? It’s because the headline on your story was this: “Is Donald Trump a traitor?”

You then spent the first passage of your article saying that you thought that if this case could be proven, this is a textbook definition of treason.

**JR:** Yeah, and I still believe it.

**GG:** Hold on Jim, hold on Jim! You then went on MSNBC.

**Chris Hayes:** In a new piece out today, Pulitzer-prize winner James Risen writes in The Intercept, pointing out a stark truth about the man currently occupying the Oval Office. “One year after Trump took office, it is still unclear whether the president of the United States is an agent of a foreign power.” Jim Risen joins me now, and it’s a real pleasure to have you.

**GG:** You cracked the code for how to be an Intercept writer and get on MSNBC, which is to write an article entitled: “Is Donald Trump a Traitor?”

**JR:** [Laughs.]

**GG:** And the reason I began my discussion of your article with this question of whether it’s fair to raise the question of treason isn’t be-



cause I'm trying to avoid the primary points raised by your piece. The reason I began with that is because you began with that. That was the headline of your story. That's what got all the attention.

**JR:** OK. So, let me respond to that. Let me first respond to your point about treason, which I think it is a valid question. I said that it's a question whether he's a traitor, I didn't say, "Yes, he is a traitor."

If you are a presidential candidate, you collaborate with a foreign government, granted, it's not an enemy of the United States and under the legal definition of treason, that may be one reason why it would never be considered treason, as you pointed out.

But the idea that if you're a presidential candidate and you get elected by colluding with an adversary of the United States, I think most Americans would think in the common usage of the term that that would be treason. Now, I'm not saying that Donald Trump is a traitor.

**GG:** There is no definition of treason or traitor besides the legal definition.

**JR:** Yeah, well, I think, I think that's, I think you're wrong about that.

**GG:** I think it's a really dangerous standard.

**JR:** I think there's a common usage and a legal usage.

**GG:** I think it's a really dangerous standard, for you to say, "OK, well maybe treason and being a traitor doesn't apply in the legal sense, but a lot of Americans think that it would apply in a colloquial sense." You know what? I can guarantee you, and I'm sure there's polling to support this in fact, in 2006 and 2007 a lot of Americans believed that the New York Times was guilty of treason.

**JR:** Yeah, a lot of people wanted to put me in jail.

**GG:** For exposing secrets that were designed to help al Qaeda learn about the U.S. And so I think it's incredibly dangerous especially for a journalist who writes about classified programs to say, "Hey, when we're talking about treason and being a traitor, let's not use this careful constitutional definition, let's just be colloquial about it and take a poll and figure out whether or not people kind of like the behavior and if they don't like it, let's just maybe suggest someone" — that's exactly why I think it's so dangerous.

**JR:** We can disagree on that point, and, but I do want to know whether or not you believe now, given the level of evidence, that there is a strong preponderance of evidence that the Russians intervened in the 2016 election.

**H.R. McMaster :** And as you can see with the FBI indictment, the evidence is now really incontrovertible and available in the public domain.

**JR:** Over time your position seems to have changed dramatically. Last year it seemed that you thought all of this was a hoax, but more recently you seem to, as I said, in kind of throwaway lines in your pieces, accept much of the idea that the Russians intervened. At the same time, you're attacking people for making too big of a deal of it. I am confused as a reader of you, and I think a lot of people are confused about what you're what your basic belief now is. Do you believe that the Russians intervened in the 2016 election?

**GG:** The idea that I ever thought or said that it was a hoax that Russia was meddling in the election is completely false. I never said anything like that.

What I've said from the beginning is the same thing that I say now, which is that the lesson of the Iraq war for sure, when, you know, it seemed like there was a whole bunch of evidence because it was appearing on the front page of the New York Times quoting foreign officials and intelligence officials with not-firsthand knowledge and all

of that about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and his alliance with al Qaeda, the lesson is that we shouldn't believe claims from the U.S. government absent convincing evidence. Meaning not anonymous sources inside of governments making assertions without underlying corroboration, but actual tangible evidence that we can see and assess for ourselves in order to make that assessment.

**James R. Clapper, Jr.:** The intelligence community assessment concluded first that president Putin first directed an influence campaign to erode the faith and confidence of the American people in our presidential election process. Second, that he did so to demean Secretary Clinton, and third that he sought to advantage Mr. Trump.

**GG:** And so, when the U.S. government came out in January of 2017 and first said that Vladimir Putin personally ordered the hacking of the DNC and John Podesta, I agreed with what Masha Gessen wrote, and she of course is a Russian expatriate and a very hardcore critic of Putin. And she said, “A close reading of the report shows that it barely support such a conclusion. Indeed, it barely supports any conclusion. There is not much to read. The declassified version is 25 pages of which two are blank, four are decorative, one contains an explanation of terms, one a table of contents, and seven are a previously published report by the CIA's open source division on RT. There's even less to process. The report adds hardly anything to what we already knew.” So my problem with this claim from the beginning was that it was unaccompanied by any And so when the U.S. government came out in January of 2017 and first said that Vladimir Putin personally ordered the hacking of the DNC and John Podesta, I agreed with what Masha Gessen wrote in the New York Times Review of Books, and she of course is a Russian expatriate and a very hardcore critic of Putin. And she said, “After months of anticipation, speculation and handwringing by politicians and journalists, American intelligence agencies have finally released the declassified version of a report on the part they believe Russia played in the U.S. presidential election. A close reading of the report shows that it barely sup-

port such a conclusion. Indeed, it barely supports any conclusion. There is not much to read. The declassified version is 25 pages of which two are blank, four are decorative, one contains an explanation of terms, one a table of contents and seven are previously published report by the CIA's open source division on RT. There's even less to process. The report adds hardly anything to what we already knew." So my problem with this claim from the beginning was that it was unaccompanied by any evidence. I think there is now some evidence that Russia did things in the election to, and I think it's a question of what their motive is — I think the Mueller indictment contains some details about 13 Russians who apparently created some fake Facebook pages and Twitter accounts and political tweets that, in contrast to what you claimed was their motive, which was to help elect Donald Trump, the Mueller indictment says that it wasn't that, it was to sow divisions within the United States. That they were also supportive of Bernie Sanders, of Jill Stein, that they were really interested in sowing division. That was the motive that they had attributed to the people that they indicted.

So when you ask me, do I believe now that Russia played a role in the election or has my view changed? My view has never changed. My view is exactly the same, which is: I'm not going to accept claims until there's evidence for them.

I think there's some evidence in the form of Bob Mueller's accusations of an indictment which are yet to be tried in court. I still don't see any evidence, other than some anonymously leaked claims, that Vladimir Putin ordered the hacking of the DNC and John Podesta's e-mails, which, remember, was the original controversy that led to the appointment of a special counsel into this entire controversy. It wasn't about Twitter bots or Facebook page ads, it was that Vladimir Putin personally ordered and directed the hacking of the DNC and John Podesta.

So no, I don't think that there is very convincing evidence on the core claim that Putin ordered those hackings. Even though I think there's evidence that some Russians did some social media activity.

**JR:** I think what you've just said is something that is very important, which is that you've now said, straight out, that you think the Russians did intervene in some way in the 2016 election. And I think that this is a big issue for you, because I've looked at your Twitter feed and there's a lot of fights you have with people who interpret what you say.

But you and I are in the communications business, and if the preponderance of what you write is interpreted by a large number of your readers in a certain way then, and it's not what you intended, then you failed as a communicator. Have you accurately communicated what you really believe over the last year?

**GG:** Totally. If you were, let me just say the idea that if people attribute to you think things that you didn't say, it means that you failed as a communicator, I think is preposterous.

It might mean that. It might be because there is an attempt to smear people who don't get on board with the prevailing orthodoxy.

In 2002, opponents of the Iraq war were constantly accused of being admirers of Saddam Hussein. Were they? No they weren't. They weren't. There's lots of motives why people attribute things to other people that aren't what they said. And the very first moment I began writing about this story, I always said the same thing, which is actually something that you said in your article that I agree with, which is that: Of course, it's possible, even plausible that there was some attempt by the Russians to destabilize the U.S. election because that's something that the U.S. and the Russians have been doing to one another forever: disseminate, division, and disinformation within the American polity. That's something that these two countries have

done to everybody. And so, it's never been the case that I've denied it or said it was a hoax. I just want to see evidence for it, as a journalist.

**JR:** I was at the New York Times while the WMD debacle was happening. I tried to fight it and it was a horrible experience. And you're absolutely right to be skeptical. I have always tried to be skeptical.

**GG:** Right. I know.

**JR:** In this case I believe that you can also go too far the other way and not be open enough to facts as they emerge. And what I find compelling today is that there are a number of facts coming from a number of different sources, both in the U.S. government, outside the government, in foreign press, The Intercept has received anonymously documents that the government didn't want us to have, that all point to a fairly strong conclusion that the Russians intervened in the election.

I don't believe that there is the same level of evidence to prove collusion. I don't think we're anywhere close to proving collusion yet.

**JS:** But Jim, let's say that we all, just for the sake of argument agree that the Russians spent money on social media campaigns that were aimed at trying to stop Hillary Clinton from becoming president. Let's say that we all, we all take that on its surface.

Let's also say that we take on its surface that Russia was behind the hacking of the DNC and the dissemination of those e-mails. But there is no evidence that links Trump to any involvement in this. Isn't the whole point here, doesn't the entire thing rest on the idea that Trump participated in this or that senior Trump people did and there — now, there's a lot of lies that are suspicious and I want to ask Glenn about some of that right. But to ask you, Jim, isn't it necessary to show that they actually participated in a criminal conspiracy?

**JR:** Yes I agree with that.

**JS:** And there isn't any evidence of that right now.

**JR:** To me we're at phase one, and my reporting is trying to get even more fundamental: Did the Russians do anything, did they intervene? Because if that's not true, then everything else falls apart.

**JS:** But let's say we all agree on that. Now what do you do with the fact that there isn't anything linking Trump in them?

**JR:** I think that is, that's the big hole in the whole story. Because I think there is fairly strong evidence that the Russians intervened in some way in the election. Whether it made much of a difference in the election is to me a different question.

The other part that I think is fairly clear is that Trump and the people around him have engaged in some form of effort to impede the Mueller investigation or to impede federal investigations into what happened. The Comey firing and a number of other things all lead to the suggestion that you might be able to build some kind of a case of obstruction.

**JS:** You've said that that is one perfectly plausible scenario, that none of the underlying allegations are proven in court.

**JR:** Yes.

**JS:** But that several people, if not many people end up going down on charges that they obstructed justice or they lied to federal investigators.

**JR:** And that's a very typical thing to happen in Washington scandals, like in Iran-Contra or things like that, you know, people go to jail for lying to the FBI, not for some underlying crime. That could be where we end up. I think collusion is going to be very difficult to prove. I think there's a lot of interesting evidence and there's a lot of things to continue to investigate. But I don't think we're there yet and we may never get there. I'm not sure it exists.

**JS:** Glenn, then how do you reckon with the fact that it seems like key people around Trump have repeatedly lied, including about very significant episodes that are in the spotlight right now, and that the president himself is regularly lying in a demonstrable way on Twitter. Doesn't it strike you as a bit odd that they all seem to be constantly sort of lying about any contacts with Russians whatsoever?

**GG:** No. It doesn't strike me as odd at all that Donald Trump and his closest aides and advisers are pathological liars.

I want to address that in one second, but I just want to address this kind of overarching point first, you know, this idea that well there's like been a focus on when media outlets get stories wrong, like the Washington Post says the Russians hacked the electric system. I think it matters a lot that we not succumb to this idea that it's OK to serve this kind of like, broader truth by getting lots of things wrong along the way. That's a concept that Stephen Colbert in Bush era mocked as "truthiness." Like, yeah, we're saying false things but it's in service of this bigger truth.

And I think it is really dangerous when you have two nuclear armed powers who have almost annihilated the species on several occasions, you still have Cold War nuclear war systems in place, to heighten tension through bad reporting, through falsehoods, through lies, I think it fuels Trump's attacks on the media, I think it sows distrust in journalism and I think it's a really important role for journalists to play to say, "What this official said is untrue, what that media outlet reported was reckless and wrong and misled a lot of people."

And to do that doesn't mean that I or other people who are doing it are saying there's nothing there. What we're saying is we ought to be journalistically faithful to the facts and not be inflammatory and reckless, and I think it matters when people in positions of power and influence get things really wrong.



On the question of Trump lying, there's no question Trump and lots of people have repeatedly lied about the core questions of this case, their meeting with Russian officials, and a whole bunch of other related issues.

But think about it: When Trump got elected and the allegation that the Democrats was that he colluded with the Russians or that the Russians helped him, he's very sensitive about that because that threatens the legitimacy of his win, it could be just for political reasons they wanted to minimize their contacts with the Russians because they think it's politically harmful if they're seen as dealing too much with the Russians. So, I could see them easily reflexively lying in order to protect themselves from political harm, that's just as plausible to me as that they're lying continuously in order to cover up underlying crimes, for which I think we're all in basic agreement that there's not very much evidence, at least as of yet.

**JR:** I agree with you that it's really valuable for you to write about the media on these issues and to call them to account. And I think that's valuable. I'm not suggesting that it's not. What I'm suggesting is that, for the most part, that's been the way that you have dealt with this story and I find it difficult to find a place in your reporting where you just straight-out laid out what you really believe about the case.

My criticism of you on this issue is that you have used these stories about the failures in the media as a way to express your own views on the case without quite laying out your own views on the case.

**JS:** Let's see what —

**JR:** And that's why I'm confused by what your real position on the substance is.

**GG:** That's because my views of what happened are always going to be based on the available evidence, and thus far, I think the available evidence has been extremely weak to nonexistent.

I think there's some evidence now that they were active and doing fake social media accounts whether, how linked they were to the government, how centralized that were, I think those are all open questions.

Of course it's possible that Putin did it, it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest but as a journalist I don't think it matters what I believe, as though I'm some kind of like a medium, you know psychically intuiting what actually happened. I think that my role as a journalist is supposed to be to evaluate convincing evidence and then report to my readers what it is that happened based not on my beliefs, but on the actual evidence.

I've always said there should be a full investigation, which is what I really want to happen where all of this evidence is put forth in a way that we don't have to rely on anonymous leaks and little snippets and self-serving people leaking certain parts for whatever their agenda is that we can't really assess, that we should actually one day be able to see all of the evidence so that we know what really happened here, but until such time we should be skeptical about these claims.

**JR:** I agree with that!

**GG:** So that's my view, that's my view.

**JR:** I agree with skepticism of the intelligence community. I think my career speaks to that.

**GG:** I agree. It does.

**JR:** And I think both, that both you and I agree completely on that. My only point is, I keep coming back to this sense that, I know you revel in being a rebel to some degree, I think a lot of the readers who criticize you, I don't think they are criticizing you because you don't believe the case or because you are skeptical. I think it's because they're coming away from what you've written, not thinking about the story that you've just written in the way that you intended them

to think about it. And I think that is a problem journalistically, because a lot of people are coming away thinking you're in denial about everything.

**GG:** Jim, I think that one of the issues with our difference here is that in general, and it's a virtue of your national security reporting, you tend to stay away from politics. And I think that you are severely underestimating the political strain that runs through how people perceive the story, the extreme importance that Democrats have placed in believing that this Russia story is true because it helps them explain a very disorienting and complicated set of events that led to someone like Donald Trump being elected president. It excuses the failures of their own party because they get to place the blame on a foreign villain instead of accepting it for themselves, and it makes it a really important political tactic in 2018 and 2020 to say that Donald Trump aided and abetted the Russians.

And so, there are definitely are good-faith critics of my reporting, I think you're one, which is why I'm debating this with you, and I think it's been constructive and I believe fully that you and I had a good-faith differences in how we're evaluating this evidence. But please do not underestimate the extent to which there are political operatives and highly partisan people who are looking to construe what I've said in the least generous light possible, because politically, it's very important for them to discredit me as one of the people who has been most vocal in expressing skepticism about these stories.

**JS:** But Glenn, you go on Fox News to do it. You go on Fox News to do it.

**GG:** I go on Democracy Now! to do it, I go on CNN to do it.

**JS:** I know, but let's not compare. Fox News is an absolute lie factory. It was before this and it will be after it. Now I've joined you in all of the criticism of MSNBC and CNN, but a lot of the times when you're on Tucker Carlson's show, Glenn, and he is, I think he is one of the

more rabid and dangerous people, particularly on issues of race in this country, you go on his show and you do not make it a point to go after him for those things that filter into what is actually going on in this country and what we should be standing in opposition to. So I find that curious.

**GG:** If I go on a TV program, you know, for example you go on Bill Maher, the last time he said you weren't going to go on because Milo was on, but before that you went on all the time with him, even though he's incredibly bigoted and racist and horrible in all kinds of ways, and, I presume you do that because you believe that the things you're saying are important and you want to have a platform and reach the most number of people that you can in order to do them.

So, if I go on a TV program and a host asked me a question about my views, I'm going to answer them truthfully and not calculate, "Let me try and go out of my way to prove to good liberals that I'm not really a Fox conservative."

My view has always been that if you believe in the things that you're saying and you think they're important you should go to as many people as possible and as many platforms as possible in order to be heard and try and persuade people of what it is that you're saying.

You know when you have Democrats comparing what the Russians did to 9/11, which led to 17 years of endless war and the erosion of civil liberties and Pearl Harbor which led to the nuking of Japan, I think the rhetoric is getting really dangerous. And so a big part of what I've done is try and reign that in out of concern that we're just going to unintentionally end up in a new Cold War or in a hot confrontation with a dangerous country.

**JR:** I think that gets to the heart of the difference but the difference in how you and I approach the story. I think you approach it as a political question and I think that's one of the key differences between us. I'm trying to find out: What are the facts in this case? Is this a

good story to follow? How do we investigate this? What are the next steps?

I think you're looking at it as a political problem that has a lot of political consequences for the country and it certainly does, but that's a different approach to the way I'm trying to look at it. I'm just trying to do this — is this a really good story? Yes, it's a good news story. And I think you see it as "this is a political threat to your political agenda," which is a very valid way to look at it, it's just different from mine.

**GG:** I do see it that way but I also think I see it journalistically and have tried to look at it through a journalistic lens which is: Let's not accept claims without evidence. To me, that is the core of journalism. And I totally agree that I see a political angle to it and that it's been important to me, that political angle. But it's also been an evidentiary one that I think that so many media outlets have gone wrong with.

**JR:** My point is, I think I told you at the beginning I didn't really get into this story until recently and it's only because I see the potential gravity of it. It hasn't had a real large historical significance yet but it has the potential to be that and I think that's why it's an important issue.

**JS:** Well, I know I'm going to be looking forward to reading the next article in Jim Risen's series, and also Glenn, your coming journalism as well.

Needless to say, folks, The Intercept is a very interesting place to be working right about now. Glenn Greenwald gets paid in rubles, Jim Risen gets paid in suitcases in cash from the CIA.

[All laugh.]

**JS:** Just wanted to make sure we got that all on the record. Jim Risen, thanks so much for doing this today.

**JR:** Thanks.

**JS:** Glenn, thank you from Rio de Janeiro.

**GG:** Alright guys. Thank you. Goodbye.

**JS:** And there is much more to that debate, which you can watch this evening on [theintercept.com](https://theintercept.com). Glenn Greenwald is co-founder of The Intercept, and James Risen, who was a The New York Times correspondent for oh, nearly two decades, is the senior national security correspondent for The Intercept.

Make sure to catch that 1-hour special on Wednesday night, and see Risen and Glenn go head to head debating this very important story from a multitude of angles. That special's gonna be at [theintercept.com](https://theintercept.com), tonight, February 21.

[Musical interlude]

**JS:** And that does it for this week's show. If you're not yet a sustaining member of Intercepted, log onto [theintercept.com/join](https://theintercept.com/join). Sam Sabzehzar is our honorary producer. We thank you him for his generous support.

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Until next week, I'm Jeremy Scahill.

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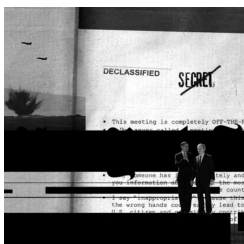
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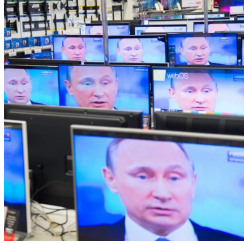
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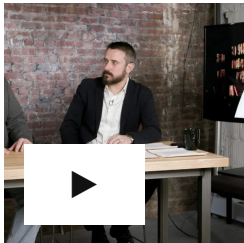
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